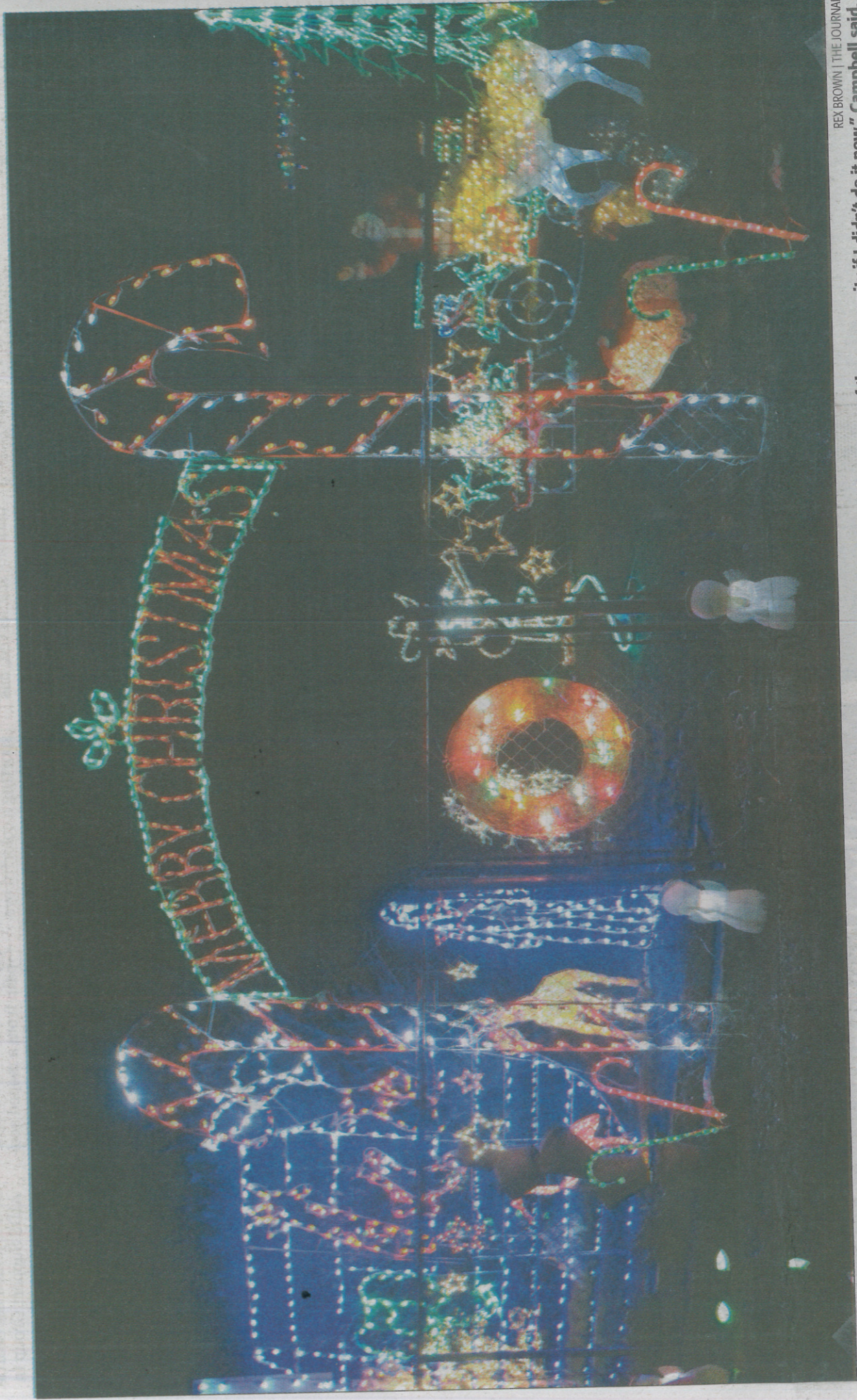


Virginia Campbell's lights are a holiday tradition



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

Virginia Campbell's Westminster yard becomes a winter wonderland every October, as it has for nearly 30 years. "I'd get thrown out of the community if I didn't do it now," Campbell said.

BY JASON EVANS
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — For Virginia Campbell's neighbors, the Christmas season begins in mid-October.

That's when Campbell's yard at 6028 West Oak Highway becomes a winter wonderland, as it has for nearly 30 years.

With each turn of the head, another detailed decoration comes to attention as festive songs play.

There's a nativity scene and a "Happy Birthday, Jesus" cake.

Those who have been driving by over the years will notice Santa has upgraded his ride in recent years. He's got a helicopter and an airplane. It's not all work for St. Nick, though — he's also seen fishing by the fence.

The Noah's Ark is just the start of the animals represented. There's also a dragon, a wiener dog, a deer and lots of monkeys.

There's also a travel opportu-

nity for viewers. Save money on a French vacation — there's an Eiffel Tower in the display.

There's a fire truck amid the lights as well, a tribute to her late husband. Campbell's husband, A.C., was a volunteer fireman and the fire chief in Oakway for 25 years.

The Campbell house is a popular destination during the holidays, especially with children.

"I'd get thrown out of the community if I didn't do it now,"

Campbell said.

The tradition started after A.C. Campbell died in October 1988.

"I didn't know how I'd get through the holidays," Virginia said of that first year.

After getting home from work — she worked at the Westpoint Stevens plant for 50 years — she began going out in the yard and working with Christmas lights.

"I'd just get out there and fool with them," she said. "They

got me through one year, and I figured they'd get me through another."

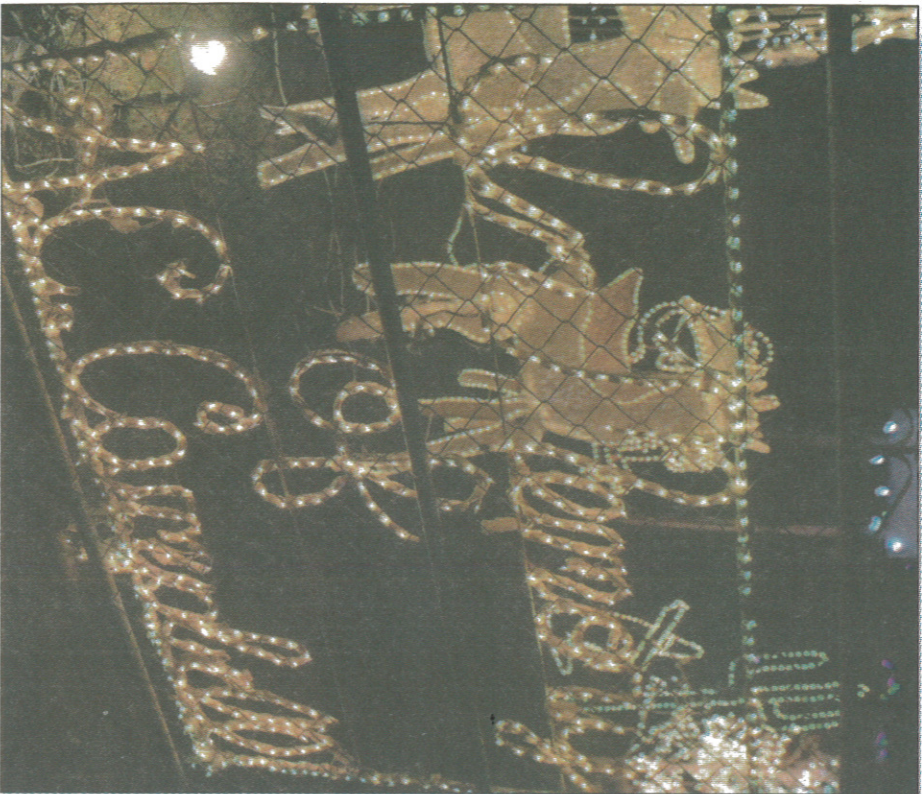
The displays grew little by little each year.

Her daughter, Helen Campbell, is her only assistant when it comes to setting everything up each year.

"I couldn't do it without her," Campbell said. "She and I, we do it all. Wire it and everything."

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LIGHTS: 'You can't see it all from the road. You've got to stop'



A tribute to Virginia Campbell's late husband, A.C., has been part of the light display in her Westminster yard for 15 years.

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Wiring is a lot of work. Some days the younger Campbell, who is in charge of the wiring, is at it for five or six hours at a time. The displays aren't computerized. "They're just old-school, plain old lights," Virginia Campbell said. "They've got a lot of movements to them, but it's not computerized."

The two women work on a deadline.

"Our goal is Thanksgiving, but we always get them up early," Virginia said.

The community gets excited when they see the displays begin to be set up.

"People start hitting their brakes and blowing their horn," Virginia said.

"We get a lot of horn blowing," Helen said.

Every night, the lights come on at 5:45 p.m. and turn off around 10 p.m.

Visitors are encouraged to park outside and walk along the outside of the fence to take in all the lights.

"You can't see it all from the road," Virginia said. "You've got to stop. You'd never see it all driving by."

The lights come down the same day every year — Dec. 26.

"By the time it gets the 25th of December, we've seen enough of them," Virginia said.

But the two women enjoy the reaction the display gets every year.

Helen and her brother, Steve, play Mrs. and Santa Claus each year. They're out there on Sundays from 6-8 p.m.

This year, Santa and Mrs.

Claus might be out greeting visitors for the next two Saturdays. They give out candy canes and listen to kids' Christmas wishes.

"One year, about three or four years ago, everybody wanted a lava lamp," Virginia said.

"Everybody," Helen agreed.

"He enjoys the kids," Virginia said of Steve. "He's sort of like a magnet to the kids."

"Usually kids are scared of Santa Claus," Helen said.

The home is also known for Virginia's pecan business. It's 40 cents a pound to get pecans cracked and \$9 per pound for ones already cracked and bagged.

"This is the nut house," Virginia said, laughing.

There's no admission to visit

the Christmas lights, but donations are accepted.

"The light bill's pretty stiff," Virginia said with a smile.

Virginia turns 83 next month. Each year's light display is a lot of work, but she said it's always worth it.

"I'd rather wear out than rust out," she said. "That's what I tell people. That's what's wrong with most people. They retire, they sit down and do nothing."

After retiring from the West-point Stevens plant in Clemson, Campbell began assisting senior citizens. She started the pecan business last year to help keep busy.

"I enjoy life," Virginia said.

"I've had a good life."

Several years ago, Helen added a sign in honor of her mother and all the hard work she puts into the display year after year for the community.

Another sign, in memory of A.C. Campbell, has been a part of the display for about 15 years.

"We put it up every year," Virginia said. "That's why the lights are here."

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